

The Basmala

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴿١﴾

In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful

Scholars say that “In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful” is an oath from our Lord which He revealed at the

beginning of every *sūra*. By it, He swears to His slaves, “What I have laid down for you, My slaves, in this *sūra* is true. I will fulfil for you all that I guarantee in this *sūra* of My promise, kindness and gentleness.” “In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful” is part of what Allah revealed in His Book, and this is special for this Community after Sulaymān. Some scholars say that “In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful” contains all the *Sharī‘a* because it indicates the Essence and the Attributes.

Sa‘īd ibn Abī Sakīna said that he heard that ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib looked at a man who had written, “In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful,” and told him, “Do it well. If a man does it well, he will be forgiven.” Sa‘īd said, “I heard that a man looked at a parchment on which was written ‘In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful,’ and kissed it and placed it on his eyes and was forgiven on account of that.” There is a similar story from Bishr al-Ḥāfī. When he picked up a rag on which was “the Name of Allah” and perfumed it, his own name became honoured. Al-Qushayrī mentioned that.

An-Nasā’ī reports from Abū’l-Malīḥ about a man who rode behind the Messenger of Allah that he mentioned that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, “When your animal stumbles with you, do not say, ‘Shayṭān has made it stumble!’ because that puffs him up until he becomes like a house and says with strength, ‘I have done it.’ Rather say, ‘In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful’ and Shayṭān will become small until he is like a fly.”

‘Alī ibn al-Ḥasan said about the words of the Almighty, “*When you mention your Lord alone in the Qur’ān, they turn their backs in flight*” (17:46), “That refers to when you say, ‘In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful.’” It is reported that ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd said, “Whoever wants Allah to rescue him from the nineteen *Zabāniyya* should recite, ‘In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful’ so that Allah will make each letter a shield for him against one of them. The *basmala* contains nineteen letters according to the number of the angels of the Fire

who Allah says are also nineteen. (74:30) They say in all that they do, ‘In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful.’ That is their strength and they take their strength from the name of Allah.”

Ibn ‘Atiyya said, “The like of this is what they say about the Night of Power being the 27th night, taking note of the position of the word “*hiya*” in the words of the *sūra*, *Al-Qadr* (97:1-5). [It is the twenty-seventh word in the *sūra*.] That is like what they say about the number of angels who hastened to report the words of the one who said, ‘My Lord, praise is Yours, abundant, excellent and blessed,’ [after rising from *rukū*’ when the Prophet said, “Allah hears the one who praises Him.”] It is about thirty letters. That is why the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, ‘I saw about thirty angels racing to see which would be the first to write it down.’” Ibn ‘Atiyya said, “This is an elegant *tafsīr*, but not a firm *tafsīr*.”

Ash-Sha‘bī and al-A‘mash report that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, wrote, “In Your Name, O Allah” until he was commanded to write “In the Name of Allah,” and then he wrote that. When it was revealed, “Say: ‘*Call on Allah or call on the All-Merciful*’” (17:110), he wrote, “In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful.” When there was revealed, “*It is from Sulaymān and says, ‘In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful’*” (27:30), he wrote that. In Abū Dāwūd, ash-Sha‘bī, Abū Mālīk, Qatāda and Thābit ibn ‘Umāra said that the Prophet did not write “In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful” until *Sūrat an-Naml* (27) was revealed.

It is reported that Ja‘far aṣ-Ṣādiq said that the *basmala* is the crown of the *sūras*. This indicates that it is not an *āyat* of the *Fātiḥa* or other *sūras*. People disagree about this and have three positions regarding it.

- It is not an *āyat* of the *Fātiḥa* or any other *sūra*. This is the position of Mālīk.
- It is an *āyat* of every *sūra*, and this is the position of ‘Abdullāh ibn al-Mubārak.

- Ash-Shāfi‘ī said that it is an *āyat* of the *Fātiḥa* and what he says about the other *sūras* varies. Sometimes he says that it is an *āyat* of every *sūra* and sometimes that it is only one of the *Fātiḥa*. There is no disagreement that it is an *āyat* of the Qur’ān inside *Sūrat an-Naml*.

Ash-Shāfi‘ī’s evidence is what ad-Dāraqūṭnī related from Abū Hurayra that the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, “When you read ‘*Praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds,*’ then recite ‘*In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful.*’ It is the Mother of the Qur’ān, the Mother of the Book, and the Seven *Mathānī*. ‘*In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful*’ is one of its *āyats*.”

The evidence of Ibn al-Mubārak and one of the positions of ash-Shāfi‘ī is what Muslim reports from Anas: “One day while the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, was among us he nodded off and then he raised his head smiling. We asked, ‘What has made you smile, Messenger of Allah?’ He replied, ‘A *sūra* was just revealed to me. It is: “*In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful. Truly We have given you the Great Abundance. So pray to your Lord and sacrifice. It is the one who hates you who is cut off without an heir.*” (108)”

The sound position is that of Mālik because the Qur’ān is not established by single reports, but by way of definitive multiple transmission about which there is no disagreement. Ibn al-‘Arabī said, “It is enough for you that there is no disagreement between people about the Qur’ān. There is no disagreement about the Qur’ān.” Sound reports which cannot be attacked indicated that the *basmala* is not an *āyat* of *al-Fātiḥa* or any other *sūra* except for *Sūrat an-Naml*. Muslim reported that Abū Hurayra said, “I heard the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, say, ‘Allah says, “I have divided the prayer into two halves between Me and My slave, and My slave will have what he asks for. When My slave says, “*Praise be to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds,*” Allah says, ‘My slave has praised Me.” He says, “*the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful,*” and the Lord says, “My slave has lauded Me.” My slave says, “*the King of the Day of Judgement,*”

and Allah says, “My slave has magnified Me (or entrusted to Me).” The slave says, “*You alone we worship. You alone we ask for help,*” and Allah says, “This is between Me and My slave and My slave will have what He asks for.” The slave says, “*Guide us on the Straight Path, the Path of those whom You have blessed, not of those with anger on them, nor of the misguided,*” and Allah says, “Those are for My slave and My slave will have what He asks for.””

Allah said, “I have divided the prayer”, meaning the *Fātiḥa*, and he called it “prayer” because the prayer is not valid except with it. So He designated the first three *āyats* for Himself, singling them out for Himself, and the Muslims do not disagree about that. Then he made the fourth between Him and His slave because it contains the abasement of the slave and seeking help from Him. That contains esteem for Allah. Then three *āyats* conclude the seven. They are three, because He uses the plural, not the dual in “Those are for My slave,” So “*those You have blessed*” is an *āyat*. Ibn Bukayr reported that Mālik said that “*those You have blessed*” is an *āyat*.

This is confirmed by the division and by what the Prophet said to Ubayy when he asked the Prophet, “How do you recite when you begin the prayer?” He replied, “I recited, ‘*Praise be to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds*’ to the end.” The *basmala* was not part of it. That was the position of the people of Madina, the people of Syria and the people of Basra. Most reciters counted “*those You have blessed*” as an *āyat*. This is also related from Abū Naḍra from Abū Hurayra who said that the sixth *āyat* is “*those You have blessed*”. The people of Kufa count the *basmala* as part of it and do not count “*those You have blessed*”.

If it is said that it is confirmed in the copies of the Qur’ān that the *basmala* is written and transmitted as it is transmitted in *an-Naml* and that this is multiple transmission, we reply that that is sound, but is it because it is Qur’ān, or is it a divider between *sūras* as is related from the Companions, “We did not know the end of the *sūra* until ‘*In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful*’ was revealed.” (Abū Dāwūd) Or it may be for the bless-

ing, in the same way that the Community agrees to write it at the beginning of books and letters. All of that is possible. Al-Jurayrī said, “Al-Ḥasan was asked about ‘In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful’ and said ‘At the beginning of letters.’” He also said, “‘In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful’ was not revealed in any of the Qur’ān except *an-Naml*.” The criterion is that the Qur’ān is not established by logic and deduction. It is established by definitive multiple transmission. So the statement of ash-Shāfi‘ī about the *basmala* being at the beginning of each *sūra* is unsound because the *basmala* is not an *āyat* of each *sūra*. Praise belongs to Allah.

It is reported that a group related that the *basmalas* are part of the Qur’ān. Ad-Dāraquṭnī dealt with all of that. We do not deny the transmission of that and we have indicated it, but we have firm reports which counter it which are related by reliable imāms and *fuqahā*. In *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, ‘Ā’isha is reported as saying, “The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, used to begin the prayer with the *takbīr* and the recitation of ‘Praise be to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds.’” Muslim also reported that Anas ibn Mālīk said, “I prayed behind the Prophet, Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, and they began with ‘Praise be to Allah.’ They did not mention ‘In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful’, either at the beginning or the end of recitation.”

So our school prefers that, and it is logical. That is because the Mosque of the Prophet in Madina passed through many years from the time of the Messenger of Allah, until the time of Mālīk and during all that time no one recited, “In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful,” following the *Sunna*. This refutes the *aḥādīth* you cite. Our people, however, prefer to recite it in the voluntary prayers, and there are traditions (*āthār*) about reciting it or an allowance for doing that. Mālīk said, “There is no harm in reciting it in the *nāfila* or simply reading the Qur’ān.”

A group of the school of Mālīk and his people said that it is not part of the *Fātiha* or any other *sūra*, and it is not read by the one who prays the obligatory or any other prayer, either silently or aloud. It is permitted to recite it in *nāfila* prayers. This is well-

known in his school and with his people. There is another transmission that it is recited at the beginning of the *sūra* in *nāfila* prayers but not at the beginning of the *Fātiḥa*. It is related that Ibn Nāfi‘ began his recitation with it in the obligatory and *nāfila* prayers and did not ever omit it. Some of the people of Madina say that there must be “In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful,” among them Ibn ‘Umar and Ibn Shihāb. Ash-Shāfi‘ī, Aḥmad, Ishāq, Abū Thawr and Abū ‘Ubayd said that. That indicates that it is a matter of *ijtihād* and not definitive, as some ignorant individuals claim.

A group of scholars believe that it is recited silently with the *Fātiḥa*. They include Abū Ḥanīfa and ath-Thawrī. That is related from ‘Umar, ‘Alī, Ibn Mas‘ūd, ‘Ammār and Ibn az-Zubayr. It is also the view of al-Ḥakam and Ḥammād, and it is stated by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and Abū ‘Ubayd. Something similar to that is related from al-Awzā‘ī. The evidence is the report from Anas ibn Mālīk: “The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, led us in the prayer and we did not hear him recite, ‘In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful.’”

This is a good position, and the traditions (*āthār*) reported from Anas agree on it and remove the disagreement about the recitation of the *basmala*. It is related that Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr said, “The idolaters used to come to the mosque. When the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, recited, ‘*In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful,*’ they said, ‘This Muḥammad mentioned the Raḥmān of Yamāma,’ meaning Musaylima. So he was commanded to recite it silently and it was revealed, ‘*Do not be too loud in your prayer or too quiet in it.*’ (17:110)” At-Tirmidhī al-Ḥakīm said, “That has lasted until now, even if the cause no longer exists, as running remains in *ṭawāf* even if the cause no longer exists and silence in the day prayers even if the cause no longer exists.”

The Community agree that it is permitted to write it at the beginning of every book of knowledge and letter. There is disagreement about books of poetry and whether or not it should be written in them.

The Sharī‘a recommends mentioning the *basmala* at the beginning of every action, like eating, drinking, slaughtering, sex, purification, embarking on a ship and the like. Allah says, “*Eat that over which the name of Allah has been mentioned*” (6:118) and “*He said, ‘Embark in it. In the name of Allah be its voyage and its landing!’*” (11:41) The Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, “Lock your door and mention the Name of Allah. Put out your lamp and mention the Name of Allah. Cover your vessel and mention the Name of Allah. Tie up your waterskin and mention the Name of Allah.” He said, “If anyone of you wants to go to his wife, he should say, ‘In the Name of Allah. O Allah, keep Shayṭān away from us and keep Shayṭān away from what You provide us with.’ If a child is decreed for them, Shayṭān will not harm him at all.” He told ‘Umar ibn Abī Salama, “Boy, say the name of Allah Almighty and eat with your right hand and eat what is in front of you.”

When ‘Uthmān ibn Abī’l-‘Āṣ complained to him of a pain he had in his body since he had become Muslim, the Messenger of Allah said to him, “Place your hand on that part of your body which pains you and say ‘In the Name of Allah’ three times and then say seven times, ‘I seek refuge in the might and power of Allah from the evil of what I feel and am on my guard against.’” Ibn Mājah and at-Tirmidhī report that the Prophet said, “The veil between the jinn and the private parts of the sons of Ādam when he enters the privy is to say, ‘In the Name of Allah.’” Ad-Dāraquṭnī reported that ‘Ā’isha said, “When the Prophet touched his *wuḍū’* vessel, he said the Name of Allah and then poured the water on his hands.”

Our scholars say that this refutes the Qadarites and others who say that our actions are decreed for us. The argument against them in that is that Allah commanded us to begin every action with the *basmala*.

The meaning of “In the Name of Allah” is “by Allah”, and the meaning of “by Allah” is by His creation and determination to reach what is reached. Some say that “In the Name of Allah” means “I begin with the help, success and blessing of Allah.” This

is Allah teaching His slaves to mention His Name at the beginning of actions.

There is disagreement about the derivation of *ism* (Name), with two basic positions. The Basrans say that it is derived from *sumū*, which means height and elevation. It is said that *ism* means that the person is in an elevated place. It is said that the name lifts the named from others. It is said that the name is called that because it is higher than the other parts of speech by its strength. The noun (*ism*) is stronger by agreement because it is the root. These are three statements.

The Kufans say that it is derived from *sima*, which means a sign, because the Name is a sign of the One to whom it is given. So the root of *ism* is *wasam*. The first is sounder because of the form of the diminutive and the form of plural which is *asmā'*. Another disagreement indicates the soundness of that, and it is the next point.

If it is true that *ism* is derived from height, Allah was described by it before creation existed, after it existed and will be when it is annihilated, and creatures have no effect on the Names or Attributes. This is the position of the people of the *Sunna*. Those who say that it is derived from *sima*, say that before time Allah was without name or attribute. When He created creatures, they gave Him Names and Attributes. When He annihilates them, He will again have no name or attribute. This is the position of the Mu'tazilites, and it is contrary to that on which the Community agree. It is worse than their error when they say, "His Word is created." Exalted above that is Allah! It is according to this that there is a disagreement about the Name and Named.

The people of truth believe, as Qāḍī Abū Bakr ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī mentioned, that the name is the thing named and Ibn Fūrak is content with that. It is the position of Abū 'Abīda and Sibawayh. If someone says, "Allah is Knowing" his words indicate the Essence which is described as being knowing. So the Name is Knowing and it is what is Named. It is the same when someone says, "Allah is the Creator." The Creator is the Lord and

it is the Name itself. So their view is that the Name is the Named itself with no distinction.

Ibn Ḥaṣṣār said, “Those among the innovators who deny the attributes claim that namings have no meaning except the Essence. That is why they say that the Name is not the Named. Whoever affirms the Attributes, affirms that the Names have meanings which are the qualities of the Essence. They are not expressions, but they are Names in their view. More of this will come in *al-Baqara* and *al-A‘rāf*.

Allah is the greatest and most comprehensive of all the Names, so that one scholar said that it is the Greatest Name of Allah and no one else has it. That is why it has no dual nor plural. That is one of two interpretations of the words of the Almighty, “*Do you know of any other with His Name?*” (19:65), in other words anyone named with His Name which is Allah. Allah is the Name of the True Existent who has all the Divine Attributes and is described as Lord and alone possesses real existence. There is no god but Him. Glory be to Him! It is said that it means the One who should be worshipped. It is said that it means the One whose existence is necessary who always was and always will be. The meaning is the same.

There is disagreement about whether this Name is derived or is a unique designation for the Divine Essence. Many of the people of knowledge believe the first but then disagree on its actual derivation and root. Sibawayh reported from al-Khalīl that its root is *ilāh*, on the measure of *fi‘āl*. The *alif* and *lām* replace the *hamza*. Sibawayh said that it is like *an-nās* (people) whose root is *anās*. It is said that its root is *lāh* and the *alif* and *lām* are added to exalt it. This is what Sibawayh preferred. Al-Kisā’ī and al-Farrā’ said that “*bismillāh*” is made up of *bismi* - *al-ilāh* and elision has occurred and the first *lām* assimilated into the second and so becomes a double *lām*.

It is said that the name Allah is derived from *walaha*, to be bewildered. *Walah* means loss of intellect, and someone who is *wālih* is bewildered. Allah bewilders minds when they think on the realities of His attributes and reflect on gnosis of Him. So the basis

of *ilāh* is *walāh* and the *hamza* is changed from the *wāw*. That is also reported from al-Khalīl. It is related that aḍ-Ḍaḥḥāk said, “He is called Allah because creatures devote (*ta'allaha*) themselves to Him in their needs and make supplication to Him in times of hardship. It is related that al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad said something similar. It is also said that it is derived from elevation and that the Arabs used to use “*lāha*” for something elevated and they used the verb for sunrise.

It is said that the name Allah is derived from the word *ilāh* (god), which means an object of worship so that the meaning of “Allah” is the Object of Worship. So what the unifiers say, “There is no god but Allah” means “there is no object of worship other than Allah.” Here “*illā*” means “other”, not “except.” Some claim that the root is *al-hā'* which alludes to the third person. That is since they affirm Him as existing in their natural intellects and indicate Him with the letter of allusion. Then the *lām* of possession is added to it since they know that He is the Creator and Master of things, and *laha* then is added for magnification.

The second position is taken by a group of scholars, including ash-Shāfi'ī, Abu'l-Ma'ālī, al-Khaṭṭābī, al-Ghazālī, al-Mufaḍḍal and others, and is related from al-Khalīl and Sibawayh. It is that the *alif* and *lām* are a necessary part of it and cannot be elided from it. Al-Khaṭṭābī said that the evidence that the *alif* and *lām* are an intrinsic part of the structure of this name and not added for definition is that it is included in the vocative, as “*Yā Allāh!*” The vocative is not combined with the definite article *alif-lām*. One does not say, “*Yā ar-Raḥmān.*” Allah knows best.

There is also disagreement about the derivation of *ar-Raḥmān*. Some of them said that it has no derivation because it is one of the names particular to Him and if it had been derived from mercy (*raḥma*), it would be connected to the one shown mercy and it would be possible to say, “Allah is *Raḥmān* to His slaves” as one does with *raḥīm*. If it had been derived from *raḥma*, the Arabs would not have denied it when they heard it because they did not deny the mercy of their Lord. Allah says, “*When they are told to*

prostrate to the All-Merciful, they say, 'And what is the All-Merciful?'" (25:60)

At al-Ḥudaybiyya, when 'Alī wrote at the command of the Prophet "In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful," Suhayl ibn 'Amr said, "As for 'In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful,' we do not know 'In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful'! Rather write 'In Your Name, O Allah.'" Ibn al-'Arabī says that this indicates that they did not know the attribute rather than the One Described. Evidence is found in the fact that they said, "What is the Raḥmān?" not "Who is the Raḥmān?" Ibn al-Ḥaṣṣār said, "It is as if he [the one who said this] had not recited the other *āyat*, 'Yet they still reject the All-Merciful.' (13:30)" One group believe that it is derived from *rahma*, and is intensive, meaning the One who possesses mercy such as no one else has. It has no plural or dual whereas *rahīm* can be dual or plural.

Ibn al-Ḥaṣṣār said that part of what indicates the derivation is what at-Tirmidhī transmitted as sound from 'Abdu'r-Raḥmān ibn 'Awf. He heard the Messenger of Allah say, "Allah Almighty says, 'I am the All-Merciful. I created kinship (*rahīm*) and split it as a name from My Name. Whoever maintains ties, I maintain ties with him. Whoever severs it, I sever him.'" This is a text for its derivation and so there is no point in contention about it. The denial of the Arabs was simply due to their ignorance of Allah and what is mandatory for Him.

Al-Anbārī mentions that al-Mubarrad stated that *ar-Raḥmān* is a Hebrew name. Aḥmād ibn Yaḥyā also said that. This view is unwarranted. Abū'l-'Abbās says that the attribute is for praise. Quṭrub says that it is possible to combine the two for stress.

There is disagreement about whether the two names *Raḥmān* and *Raḥīm* have one meaning or two meanings. It is said, that they mean the same, as do *nadmān* and *nadīm*. It is said that *Raḥmān* is a special name with general action and *Raḥīm* is a general name with a particular action. This is the position of the majority.

Abū 'Alī al-Fārisī said that *Raḥmān* is a general name for all types of mercy for which Allah is singled out. *Raḥīm* can be used

for how He is towards the believers, as He says, “*He is merciful to the believers.*” (33:43). Al-‘Arazamī says that *Raḥmān* is merciful to all His creatures with rain, physical and general blessings, and *Raḥīm* is merciful to the believers in guiding them and being kind to them. Ibn al-Mubārak said that when the *Raḥmān* is asked He gives and when the *Raḥīm* is not asked, He is angry. Ibn ‘Abbās said that they are two fine (*raqīq*) names, and one is finer than the other, meaning that it has more mercy.

Al-Khaṭṭābī said, “This is problematic because fineness has no place in any of the attributes of Allah.” Al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Faḍl al-Bajalī said, “This is an error on the part of the transmitter because fineness (*riqqa*) is not part of the attributes of Allah at all. Rather, they are two compassionate (*rafīq*) names, one more compassionate than the other. Compassion is one of the Attributes of Allah Almighty. The Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, ‘Allah is Compassionate. He loves compassion and gives for compassion what he does not for harshness.’”

Most scholars agree that the name *ar-Raḥmān* is used only for Allah Almighty and it is not permitted to call anyone else by it. Do you not see that He says, “Say: ‘Call on Allah or call on the All-Merciful’” (17:110)? So it is equal to the Name in which none but Him share. He says, “Ask those We sent before you as Our Messengers: Have We ever designated any gods to be worshipped besides the All-Merciful?” (43:445) So they reported that the *Raḥmān* deserved worship. Musaylima the Liar¹ – may Allah curse him – was outrageous and called himself “the *Raḥmān* of Yamāma” and so was called “the Liar”.

Ar-Raḥīm is general and can be used in respect of creatures. As *ar-Raḥmān* is universal as we said, *ar-Raḥīm* provides harmony and balance in the revelation. Al-Mahdawī stated that. It is said that the meaning of *ar-Raḥīm* is: “It is by the *Raḥīm* that you reach to the *Raḥmān*.” So *ar-Raḥīm* is the attribute of Muḥammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and Allah described him with that. He says, “compassionate, merciful” when describing

1. Musaylima the Liar: a false Prophet of the Banū Ḥanīfa in Yamāna who was one of the leaders of the Ridda.

him. So it is as if the meaning of saying, “In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful” is “It is by Muḥammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, that you will reach Me,” in other words by following him and what he has brought, you will reach My reward, honour and the vision of My face.” Allah knows best.

It is related that ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib said, “*Bismillāh* is healing from every illness and protection against every disease. *Ar-Raḥmān* is a help for everyone who believes in Him. It is a name not used for anyone else. *Ar-Raḥīm* is for those who repent, believe and perform righteous actions.”

Some of them explained the meaning according to the letters. It is related that ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān asked the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, about the interpretation of “In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful.” He said, “The *bā’* is the trial (*balā’*) of Allah, His relief, brilliance and radiance (*bahā’*). The *sīn* is the splendour (*sanā’*) of Allah. The *mīm* is the kingdom (*mulk*) of Allah. As for Allah, there is no god but Him. The *Raḥmān* is kind to both the pious and impious of His creatures. The *Raḥīm* is kind only to the believers.” It is reported that Ka’b al-Aḥbar said, “The *bā’* is His radiance (*bahā’*), the *sīn* is His splendour (*sanā’*), and there is nothing higher than it. The *mīm* is His kingdom, and He has power over all things and nothing is hard for Him.”

It is said that every letter is the opening of one of His Names. The *bā’* is the key to His Name *Baṣīr* (All-Seeing). The *sīn* is the key to His Name, *Samī’* (All-Hearing). The *mīm* is the key to His Name, *Malīk* (Master). The *alif* is the key to His Name, Allah. The *lām* is the key to His Name, *Laṭīf* (Kind). The *hā’* is the key to His Name, *Hādī* (Guide). The *rā’* is the key to His Name, *Rāziq* (Provider). The *ḥā’* is the key to His Name, *Ḥalīm* (Forbearing). The *nūn* is the key to His Name, *Nūr* (Light). The meaning of all this is supplication of Allah at the beginning of everything.

There is disagreement how ‘*ar-Raḥīm*’ is connected in recitation to ‘*al-ḥamdu lillāh*’. Umm Salama related that the Prophet recited ‘*ar-Raḥīm*’ with a *sukūn* on the *mīm*, stopping there and

then beginning with a fresh *alif*. Some of the Kufans recited it in that way. Most people recite, ‘*ar-Raḥīmi*’*l-ḥamdu*’, with a *kasra* on the *mīm* and connecting it to the *alif* in *al-ḥamd*. Al-Kisā’ī reported that some Arabs read it ‘*ar-Raḥīma*’*l-ḥamdu*’, with *fatha* on the *mīm* and connected to the *alif*, as if the *mīm* was in fact silent, but with an elision into the *alif*. Ibn ‘Aṭiyya said, “This recitation is not reported from anyone I know.”